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ABSTRACT

Recent statistics on the Canadian family suggest that, for many families, family life is now characterized by exhaustion, deprivation, older members, and the provision of support services by agencies rather than by unpaid women. Stress, in particular, is an effect of heavy burdens and a cause of new ones. But families cannot be adequately understood apart from the economic system in which they live. For example, as families juggle work and family responsibilities, absenteeism in the workplace increases. Stress caused by preoccupation with family responsibilities can substantially reduce productivity on the job. Many Canadian employers believe that at least one quarter of the human resource problems they face are due to employees having to manage dual responsibilities at home and at work. Governments can demonstrate leadership in making work and family responsibilities more compatible by: (1) enacting legislation that creates a responsive work environment; (2) demonstrating flexible employment practices; and (3) facilitating the development of new approaches conducive to the social change associated with a better balance between work and family responsibilities. Strategies that integrate workers with family responsibilities into corporate structures are emerging in a number of Canadian corporations and organizations. These strategies include flexible benefit programs, employee family benefits, and services and supports for employees' family members. (RH)

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FAMILY PROBLEMS ON THE JOB

Responding to the needs of employees with
family responsibilities

Some Discussion Notes

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WORKERS WITH FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

Combining work and family responsibilities is nothing new. Workers have for years carried with them the daily needs of their families. So what has changed to make this area of family life increasingly problematic? In generations past, it was generally the case that the men of the family worked outside of the home while the women assumed responsibility for the work within the home. Extended family members also provided mutual support for family related needs. But Canadian families have been changing. They have become smaller. Less children and fewer extended families. Less one-earner and more dual-earner families. They have become more geographically mobile with less and less neighbourhood supports. The only thing that has not really changed is that families still require a basic amount of care which has to be fitted in somewhere.

And so the stress upon family members, both men and women, to perform well on the job and to be there to take care of their children's needs, and or the needs of their elderly parents, and or the needs of other relatives, has reached a critical point. The ability to be a productive member of the work force and a productive family member is being severely tested and it falls to employers and employees to begin to figure out ways to lessen the burden.

A GENERAL LOOK AT THE CONTEXT IN WHICH WORKERS AND FAMILIES LIVE:

- Canada's population is aging. In the past 25 years, the median age of males has increased by 4 years and the median age of females has increased by 5 years.
- Canada's population is growing more slowly. In 1986 it grew by less than 1% over 1985. With a lower birth rate comes a decrease in the number of people entering the workforce.
- While 90% of Canadians will marry, demographers predict that 40% of new marriages will end in divorce. The number of people who have been divorced is one in ten adults.
- In the 1961 Census, 61% of Canadian families were the so-called "traditional" one wage-earner family. In 1971 there were 32% and in 1981, only 16% of Canadian families were in the one wage earner category.

- There are more women in the labour force. Their labour force participation increased to 57.4% in 1988.
- Married women in the labour force has doubled in the period from 1971 to 1986. In the early 1950's only 11% were in the labour force. By 1986, that number was up to 56%.
- Women with children have grown from 20% of the workforce in 1961 to 41% of the workforce in 1986. More than 6 out of 10 women with children are now in the labour force.
- There are more dual-earner families in the labour force. 53.1% of all married couples are employed.
- There are more single-parent families. Numbers have increased by 19.6% from 1981 to 1986. 61.2% of single parents were in the workforce in 1986.
- Real incomes of families are declining - the median family income has not grown since 1979. While it used to be that the "family wage" could support a family, the decreasing purchasing power of an industrial wage now requires that more than one family member be in the workforce.
- The value of the minimum wage has shrunk dramatically. Two spouses working at minimum wage now earn 92% of the poverty line for a family of three. In 1975, one worker on minimum wage earned 81% of the poverty line for the same family.
- Geographical mobility of Canadian families is among the highest in the industrialized world with more than 50% of Canadians changing residence from neighbourhood to neighbourhood or from town to town, every 5 years.
- An estimated 20% - 30% of the workforce has some responsibility for the care of an elderly family member.

WHAT DO ALL THESE STATISTICS MEAN IN HUMAN TERMS?

- With dual wage earnings families now the norm, exhaustion and tiredness have become the order of the day. Families share their tiredness - they share their leftovers.

- Single-earner families suffer relative deprivation compared to dual-earning families. And single-parent families bear the heaviest burden.

- Families are smaller through decreased fertility, and therefore the population generally is aging.

- In effect, women subsidized the labour force as long as they remained at home supplying informal support services to workers families for free. Those support services must now be provided by paid formal services. Examples, day-care, restaurant meals, home-care and so on.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR FAMILIES? WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE LEISURE SOCIETY?

The linear requirements of work do not fit with the cyclical responsibilities of family life. What this means is that family responsibilities are untidy and do not fall neatly into after-work hours. Consequently, the balance between work and family is almost always in favour of work.

The difficulties being experienced by workers with family responsibilities in balancing work and family obligations result in many negative impacts on the family. Stress in particular is both a physical and emotional effect of heavy burdens as well as a cause of new ones. In a survey conducted by the Canada Employment and Immigration Council, stress resulting from such factors as time pressures, financial burdens and "role overload" was seen as a frequent cause of increased alcohol and drug abuse, child and elder abuse, as well as the withdrawal of responsibilities towards a spouse. These in turn contribute to an increase in the divorce rate which places financial burdens (and therefore added stress) on the estranged partners, loss of energy, or "burn out" and, a decline in the birth rate. The Council also noted that respondents to their survey expressed great concern about the growing risks to the well-being of children through the lack of time spent with the working parent, the lack of child care, and the phenomenon of "latch-key " children left alone after school.

When we consider what constitutes the basic necessities of life for a family, there is no doubt that our standards have changed in the past 30 years. Some would argue that we have become greedy. But we cannot look at families in isolation from the economic system in which they live. We have to examine the market forces that drive the economy. For example, housing starts form a key indicator of economic health. And it is families that usually shoulder the burden of mortgages. Ironically, in marketing terms, divorce is seen as a tremendous opportunity for consumption where two times everything replaces a single household's needs.

- Quoting from U.S. statistics - the average number of hours worked per week at home and in the workplace by adults with families

85 hours for a woman with husband and children

65 hours for a husband with wife and children

75 hours for a single mother

(NOTE: husbands can cause an extra 10 hours work per week)

- In Canada in the 1950's 45-48 hours per week of paid labour was required to provide a "family wage". In the 1980's and 1990's, 65-75 hours of paid labour is required for the equivalent "family wage".
- The number of "moonlighting" Canadians has risen to more than half a million, a 65% increase since 1980. Nearly one worker in 20 is currently holding down two or more jobs in order to make ends meet. Nearly half this group works more than 50 hours per week.
- The highest proportion of moonlighters were teenagers. More than 40% of teenage moonlighters work at least 20 hours per week at multiple jobs. While often supplementing the family income, such activity may also create problems with academic performance, and other family responsibilities.
- Geographical mobility caused by employment opportunities creates enormous dislocation in family life. For example
 - caring for an elderly family member by long distance telephone;
 - removal of family supports such as child care;
 - disruption of spousal career;
 - school relocation for children
- Both the disabled and the elderly are living longer.

Trends in care of both disabled and elderly are toward community or at home living as the preferred option for many of those who would have been previously institutionalized. As well, governments are attempting to cut spending in institutional care. Generally, community care or at home living has meant family care, usually by female family members. With over 55% of Canadian women in the workforce, this creates additional responsibility for families.

- Women generally assume the greater responsibility for family caregiving, even when both spouses are employed. As a result, many families manifest the "overtime mother - undertime father" phenomenon with accompanying stress, guilt, frustration, exhaustion and conflict.
- As families try to balance work and family responsibilities, absenteeism in the workplace has increased. Canadians were absent from work for personal or family reasons twice as often in 1987 as in 1977.
- The greatest amount of absenteeism is the result of a breakdown in childcare arrangements. Women, particularly with pre-school children have a higher incidence of absences than men. Men have a higher incidence than women when it comes to problems involving older children. It might be argued that men's absenteeism rate is low because women's absenteeism rate is high. Family responsibilities have to be assumed by someone.
- Work/family problems generally occur for a man if he loses his job whereas women's work/family pressures usually increase when she takes a job.
- Caring for sick family members or when childcare arrangements break down or when family emergencies occur usually means that an employee will be required to take time off work. Since most employers do not provide special leave for such family responsibilities, employees generally use their own sick leave or vacation allowance. In most instances, this means that female employees lose since they are the ones most likely to take the time off work.
- Entry into the labour force can be compromised by family status - for example young women may be denied employment opportunities if the potential employer feels they may become pregnant and quit work.

- Stress caused by preoccupation with family responsibilities can substantially reduce productivity on the job. Presence does not necessarily equal performance. Latchkey kids who must remain unsupervised and alone in the family home until parents return from work create anxiety for parents and the 3.30 pm call from work to check up on them is a common phenomenon in many workplaces. For many workers, even access to a telephone is a problem.

- Employers tend to believe that problems at home affect performance in the workplace. Problems in the workplace can have substantial impact on the family lives of employees. According to a recent Conference Board of Canada survey, 66% of surveyed employees have experienced at least some degree of difficulty balancing their responsibilities at work and at home. For 20% of employees, juggling various demands was considered very difficult or difficult to accomplish. Almost 80% of those surveyed said they experienced some degree of stress or anxiety as a result of trying to cope with conflicting demands. Over 25% indicated experiencing a lot to a moderate degree of stress. Also reported in this survey - that over 10% reported that they had left a position or a job in the past because of work and family conflicts and over 14% said they were considering doing the same thing.

- In the same survey, slightly over 30% of the respondents thought that their child care or other dependant care responsibilities had in some way limited their opportunities for advancement. Home obligations created situations where they weren't able to put in overtime or to relocate or transfer when required.

- At a time when many families need two incomes to survive, loss of income due to unpaid leave for family responsibilities can create great hardship.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS?

Employers are facing two main problems today:

- a growing shortage of appropriately skilled workers;
- a rapidly changing global economic system which requires a more competitive bottom line

What they find as their pool of potential workers is:

- There is no longer an "average" employee. Family structures and family responsibilities may be completely different from employee to employee. Gone is the traditional single-earner with spouse at home that used to be the average employee's family.
- families are increasingly dual-wage earning with less ability or enthusiasm for transferring from branch office to branch office. A Conference Board survey noted that slightly over 17% of employees who had been offered promotions turned them down for family reasons, and almost 25% had refused transfer opportunities.
- women, who represent over 44% of the labourforce, have a greater potential to withdraw from the workforce because of difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities. This can have serious cost implications for employers.
- A U.S. study found that administrative costs associated with hiring new employees, such as recruiting and interviewing time and the new employee's learning curve time, represent 93% of an employee's first year's salary.
- Absenteeism due to family related responsibilities represents a major drain on the employer's bottom line. A U.S. company implemented a program for the care of sick children after realizing it was losing \$165,000 per year due to parents taking time off when their children were ill. Another company estimated the cost of employee absenteeism due to family responsibilities at \$250,000 per year at one branch office alone.

- In a Canadian survey of employers, a significant number believed that at least one quarter of the human resource problems they face in the areas of absenteeism, tardiness, stress, productivity and quality of performance, are due to employees having to manage dual responsibilities at home and at work.

HOW CAN WORK AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES BE MADE MORE COMPATIBLE?

It is inevitable that family responsibilities will, at one time or another, come into conflict with responsibilities in the work place. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the costs of trying to ignore the importance of family responsibilities are enormous in terms of stress, job performance, health, family violence, productivity and so on. What can be done? What is being done in Canada today? Whose responsibility is it to ensure that family and work can live together more harmoniously? Clearly, governments and employers can demonstrate leadership in this area and in recent years, there have been some encouraging signs.

At the 1987 First Ministers Conference, provincial and federal government leaders recognized that changes were needed in attitudes, programs, services and legislation. They noted that the underlying premises of the integration of work and family responsibilities are that:

- . family commitments should be shared by men and women; and
- . the specific needs of workers with dependents should be taken into account to ensure that they have the same range of opportunities and the same treatment as workers without dependents.

Governments can do this in three ways:

- legislation to create an environment more accommodating of the needs of persons with family responsibilities;
- as employer, by demonstrating flexible employment practices that are responsive to the needs of workers with family responsibilities;

- as a service and social support provider, it can facilitate the development of new approaches and promote the attitudinal shifts that are needed to adapt to societal changes associated with achieving a better balance between work and family responsibilities.

Examples of legislative initiatives at the federal level would include changes to the Canada Labour Code which covers such things as the maximum number of hours per week and the minimum periods of annual leave with pay that Canadian workers can expect. Maternity leave originally introduced in 1971 now includes provision for financial support through the continuation of fringe benefits during leave, and through partial income support through the Unemployment Insurance Act. Changes to the Canadian Pension Plan now allow one parent to exclude from the calculation of their pension any periods of zero or low earnings while caring for a child under the age of seven. The Income Tax Act has also been modified to provide some financial relief to working parents who must use child care.

As an employer, governments at all levels can demonstrate leadership by implementing workplace policies and practices that facilitate the integration of work and family responsibilities. Some examples of such government initiatives include:

- leave for family responsibilities which would include responsibility not only for children but also for elderly parents or disabled family members or for other family members that temporarily require assistance.
- self-funded leave where an employee can defer a portion of their salary for a number of years in order to take paid leave of absence at a later date.
- TOTS - Take off the Summer - which is a PEI government program which permits parents to take the summer months off to be with their children.
- educational leave
- on-site child care facilities, either subsidized totally or in part.
- flexible hours for training programs

Both federal and provincial governments have, to a greater or less extent, implemented a variety of policies and programs within their jurisdictions as employers and legislators. And, of course, the private sector employer is also a major contributor to the work/family environment of Canadian families.

Generally speaking, employers have responded to major catastrophic situations relating to employees and their families - for example, fringe benefits which include life insurance, disability insurance, and health insurance. However, the day-to-day minor catastrophes of normal family life which can be equally problematic to both employer and employee do not seem to have received much acknowledgement. In a U.S. survey of employees, their number one concern, even more than salaries, was flexibility in the workplace. Time to deal with family situations.

Employers in Canada currently provide a range of leaves to deal with various employee needs. These are certainly not available to all employees across the country and depend a great deal on the size of the company, the nature of any collective union agreement, provincial legislation, corporate profitability and corporate culture. Some of these leaves include:

- . maternity
- . paternity, although this is not as common as maternity
- . adoption
- . special leave for family reasons
- . personal sick leave for family reasons
- . bereavement
- . leave in lieu of overtime pay
- . educational
- . sabbatical

These leaves may be fully paid, partially paid or non-paid. The issue of paid or non-paid is a very critical one for families where the two incomes are essential for their economic well-being. Simply having a policy in place which allows employees to take time off to take care of family responsibilities is not helpful if it also penalizes financially.

In order to facilitate the integration of workers with family responsibilities into the corporate structures, several strategies are beginning to emerge in a number of Canadian corporations and organizations.

These include:

- job sharing
- flextime
- compressed work weeks
- shorter work weeks
- part time with no benefits
- part time with benefits
- shorter work days
- at-home working arrangements

Flexible benefit programs or menu fringe benefits are also appearing in some corporations. Employees may choose among a variety of benefit options in order to tailor their package to meet their particular family needs at a given point in time.

As well, some employers extend regular employee benefits to include employee family coverage. These include:

- dental benefits
- spousal life insurance
- extended health insurance

Also, employers may extend services and supports directly to employees' family members. For example:

- child care referral service
- child care centres
- care for sick children
- parent education seminars
- support for child care while employee is on business outside of normal working hours
- summer camps
- after-school programs
- relocation counselling
- elder care referral service
- service for elders at home or in institutions
- information on care for the disabled
- service for disabled at home or in institutions
- facilities for disabled or elderly
- support for elderly or disabled while employee is on business outside of normal working hours

Equally important, many employers have begun to examine and assess all company policies to see how they actually impact on their employees and their families. For example:

- relocation practices
- training programs, particularly after regular hours or out of town
- shift work requirements

Employers also have a responsibility to encourage a corporate culture which recognizes the legitimacy of the needs of employees and their families outside of the workplace. No matter how many programs and policies are put into place, there will be little benefit if there is a reluctance on the part of management and on the part of employees to avail themselves of those programs. Attitudes of co-workers can have a great influence as well.

As an example, in Sweden there is a wide range of paid and unpaid leave provisions for workers with family responsibilities. Men are entitled under a parental insurance program to take a leave of absence for child care. However, a recent report by the Swedish government noted that

"men who are willing to take paid leave of absence for care of their children frequently encounter derision and ridicule of their colleagues at work, particularly if the workplace is predominantly male."

Attitudes obviously play a tremendously important part in creating a family friendly corporate culture. Another example would be the attitude that presumes that family responsibilities are generally to be managed by the female employees, and so there is a tendency in dealing with work and family conflict to focus on making it easier for women to combine those two areas of responsibility. Obviously there needs to be a corporate culture which recognizes the equal responsibility of men and women when it comes to responding to family needs.

Values, biases, and beliefs have more influence on corporate policy than simple cost-benefit analysis data. The personal commitment of employees and employers, and a concern for corporate image, both play an important role along with a concern for productivity and the bottom line. A company's economic edge need not be impeded by progressive family-friendly company policy.

The changing nature of both work and family life require programs and policies which protect the corporate bottom line while at the same time facilitating and enabling employees to assume the important role of caring and providing for their families. Since the average worker spends at least one third of their day in the workplace, employers obviously share a large responsibility for the well-being of their employees. We do need corporate culture to become more "family friendly". But we also have to realize that the well-being of families is not the private responsibility of families alone, nor of corporations alone. It is a responsibility shared by families, governments, corporations, non-government organizations, churches, communities and individuals. Families should not feel isolated

as they attempt to cope with the very real stresses and strains of combining work and family responsibilities.

Some examples of practical supports to families might include:

- governments through such vehicles as family income supports and parental leave legislation can create a more enabling environment for working parents

municipalities can examine the design of their communities to ensure that they are family friendly.

- community resources such as schools can be put to better use.

- community programs which bring together generations and create climates of neighbourliness and cooperation, can provide much needed support to working families.

Families need to work and the economy needs families. This mutual interdependence requires that work and family responsibilities be recognized as equally important and essential to the well-being of Canadian society.

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